Anomalies in stiffness and damping of a 2D discrete viscoelastic system due to negative stiffness components

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Abstract

The recent development of using negative stiffness inclusions to achieve extreme overall stiffness and mechanical damping of composite materials reveals a new avenue for constructing high performance materials. One of the negative stiffness sources can be obtained from phase transforming materials in the vicinity of their phase transition, as suggested by the Landau theory. To understand the underlying mechanism from a microscopic viewpoint, we theoretically analyze a 2D, nested triangular lattice cell with pre-chosen elements containing negative stiffness to demonstrate anomalies in overall stiffness and damping. Combining with current knowledge from continuum models, based on the composite theory, such as the Voigt, Reuss, and Hashin–Shtrikman model, we further explore the stability of the system with Lyapunov’s indirect stability theorem. The evolution of the microstructure in terms of the discrete system is discussed. A potential application of the results presented here is to develop special thin films with unusual in-plane mechanical properties.

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1. Introduction

For mechanical systems containing a negative stiffness phase, anomalies in stiffness and damping have been observed experimentally [1,2] and described theoretically [3–7]. These references establish the connection between the anomalous phenomena and composite theory, according to the Voigt, Reuss and Hashin–Shtrikman model. Negative stiffness can result from a phase change to lower density in one grain. Significant interactions at the interface between a negative stiffness and positive stiffness phase have been shown to be the cause of the extreme overall stiffness and damping. The interactions can be envisioned as different vibrational modes in the context of dynamics, where the extreme stiffening effect due to the negative stiffness phase resembles that an anti-resonance peak originates from a specific mode that minimizes vibration amplitudes. While the analogy between a vibrational system and the negative stiffness composite system can be established, it should be emphasized that the anomalies due to negative stiffness can occur in the quasi-static limit, i.e. with zero external driving frequency. We remark that the negative Poisson’s ratio material, reported in [8,9], should be distinguished from the negative stiffness material in that the former is stable for a Poisson’s ratio, ν, in the range −1 < ν < 0, and the latter is unstable but can be observed experimentally through displacement control. A composite system, consisting of positive and negative stiffness phases, can be stabilized by a surface constraint of the matrix upon the inclusions, provided the matrix is stiff enough. If, however, the negative stiffness inclusions violate strong ellipticity conditions [3], then they are expected to form bands as a result of continuum instability.

Our stability analysis follows the Lyapunov indirect theorem in the dynamical systems theory [10]. Contrary to conventional stability theory based on energy arguments, the Lyapunov theorem investigates stability of a dynamical system. According to the energy-based stability theory, for purely elastic systems in the continuum limit, the Gibbs free energy may be the appropriate potential to investigate the elastic instability under homogeneous deformation when the system is under load...
control [11,12]. However, when some interior points of
the material are relatively less stable and remote from the external
boundary, the Helmholtz free energy becomes the appropriate
potential energy for probing local instability based on the Born
and Huang theory [13–15]. This theory can be viewed as an
extension of the Lyapunov indirect theorem in the theory of
linear elasticity with pre-stress. Furthermore, the Lyapunov
method can deal with non-conservative systems, such as a
viscoelastic one. Examination of the influence of negative bulk
modulus on effective stiffness of a mechanical system in elas-
ticity can be found in Reference [16], where several mechanical
systems are analyzed for their stability along the direction of
applied force.

Thin films are the manifestation of two-dimensional
materials. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate and
analyze anomalous mechanical properties, structural evolution
and stability of a two dimensional discrete structure due to
negative stiffness effects under in-plane loading. This structure
can be realized as a cell or building block for a lattice. The
lattice will be stable if all the cells in it are stable. For thin
films, the lattice would represent a pattern of negative stiffness
and positive stiffness phases. The repeat unit in the pattern
would be represented by a cell. Special attention is placed on
the structural integrity and stability of the system when it
exhibits extreme mechanical properties, such as stiffness and
damping.

In our analysis, geometrical linearity is assumed; however,
the use of negative stiffness for an element implies the con-
sideration of geometric nonlinearity on that element [4]. That
is to say that the negative stiffness in the element is a result of
its deformed geometry, which is taken as the initial reference
position for the equilibrium analysis. The analysis from this
point forward assumes geometric linearity. Each element of
the system is assumed to be a standard linear solid with
selected elements containing negative stiffness. The limitations
of linear models reflecting limited reality are acknowledged.

However, through the linear analysis, we can obtain further
understandings of the system with a negative stiffness
inclusion, as the following: (1) structure evolution corresponding to quasi-static processes, (2) damping with
respect to different deformation modes and (3) stability of the
extreme properties.

2. Analysis

A nested triangular lattice cell, as shown in Fig. 1, is of
interest to explore stable extreme mechanical properties. The
figure shows the node numbers, load and displacement boundary
conditions, and displacement coordinates at each node. The
elements adopted here are the two-force members, also known as
the truss element in structural mechanics, depicted as the solid
lines connecting the solid circles in the figure. Fig. 2 shows a
single element, used in our analysis, in its local and global
coordinates. In the triangular cell, there are 12 elements that
enclose 7 single domain triangles. In the following, we formulate
the mechanical problem of the triangular lattice cell, based on the

Fig. 1. Configuration of the nested triangular cell composed of 12 two-force members, shown as solid lines. Each element of the inner triangle (Δ1456) has stiffness \( k_1 \), and each element of the outer triangle (Δ123) has stiffness \( k_3 \). The stiffness of linking element between inner and outer triangle is denoted \( k_2 \). Solid circles represent mass points: \( m_1 \) for the outer and \( m_2 \) for the inner. The length of an element of the inner triangle is 5 mm, and the radius of outer triangle is 5.6 times greater than that of the inner. \( x = 2 \sin^{-1} \left( \frac{L_2}{L_1} \right) \), \( \beta = (\pi - \alpha)/2 \). Loading conditions (\( P_1, P_2, P_3 \)) are so arranged that the lattice cell may experience hydrostatic pressure, simple shear or uniaxial compression.

Fig. 2. A schematic for a two-dimensional spring element in its local (ξ–η) and
global (x–y) coordinate system.
The inner \((k_i)\) and outer triangle \((k_5)\) are equilateral, i.e., \(L_1=L_2=L_3\), and \(L_{10}=L_{11}=L_{12}\). Each of the links between the inner and outer triangle has the spring constant \(k_5\). A symmetry assumption is applied in the material properties of the elements, in accordance with the symmetry of the geometry. We assume that only \(k_i\) can have negative stiffness. It is noted that to fully maintain the symmetry, the loading, \(P_3\), \(P_5\) and \(P_6\) cannot be totally arbitrary. To test the bulk stiffness of the model by analogously applying hydrostatic pressure on the lattice cell, we assume \(P_3=γ\cos(π/6), P_5=0\) and \(P_6=γ\). As for a simple shear test, we set \(P_3=γ, P_5=γ\) and \(P_6=0\); a uniaxial compression simulation, \(P_3=0, P_5=0\) and \(P_6=γ\). It can be verified that all the forces, applied loads and reaction forces from the supports, point at the center of the structure for the bulk mode. To calculate the mechanical responses of the structure, the finite element method [17] is adopted. For a purely elastic analysis, the elements are structural trusses. The elemental stiffness matrix of a truss can be written as follows, with the definition of \(θ\) shown in Fig. 2.

\[
k = k \begin{bmatrix}
\cos^2 θ & \cos θ \sin θ & -\cos^2 θ & -\cos θ \sin θ \\
\cos θ \sin θ & \sin^2 θ & -\cos θ \sin θ & \cos θ \sin θ \\
-\cos^2 θ & -\cos θ \sin θ & \cos^2 θ & \cos θ \sin θ \\
-\cos θ \sin θ & \sin^2 θ & \cos θ \sin θ & \cos θ \sin θ
\end{bmatrix}.
\]

(1)

Here \(k\) is the stiffness matrix with the dimension of \(1 \times 1\) in the local \((ξ, η)\) coordinate system, and \(k\) the stiffness matrix in the global \((x, y)\) coordinate system. Our method of computation follows the spirit of the finite element method [17], but the equations of motion are expressed in terms of the system’s state-space variables, which are displacements, velocities and internal forces. The merit of using this formulation is the ease of incorporating viscoelastic effects and stability analysis. In the finite element method, suitable displacement boundary conditions are necessary to ensure the stiffness matrix of the system is non-singular. The imposed displacement boundary conditions will not limit our exploration about the effects of negative stiffness, but only introduce a rigid-body shift. The equations of motion of the structure in terms of nodal displacements are

\[
M \cdot \ddot{U} + F = P,
\]

(2)

\[
F = A^T \cdot \mathbf{f}, \quad \text{and}
\]

\[
f_j + T_{jg} \dot{f}_g = k_j(A_j + T_{jg} \dot{A}_g), \quad j = 1, 2, 3, \ldots, 12,
\]

(4)

where \(M = \text{diag}(m_2 m_2 m_1 m_1 m_1 m_1 m_1) \in \mathbb{R}^{9 \times 9}\) is the mass matrix, \(U = [u_1 u_5 u_6 i_r u_6 u_6 u_6 u_{10} u_{11}]^T \in \mathbb{R}^{9 \times 1}\) the displacement vector, \(F\) internal force vector, projected on the global coordinate, and \(P\) the external force vector as indicated in Fig. 1. The operator \(diag\) forms a diagonal matrix. The internal force inside each spring element can be collected to form the column vector, as follows.

\[
f = [f_1 f_2 f_3 f_4 f_5 f_6 f_7 f_8 f_9 f_{10} f_{11} f_{12}]^T \in \mathbb{R}^{12 \times 1}.
\]

(5)

Essentially, Eq. (4) stipulates that each of the elements in the system behaves as a standard linear solid in the context of linear viscoelasticity. To convert information in the local coordinates \((ξ, η)\) to the global \((x, y)\) coordinates, we define the contribution matrix, \(A\), as follows.

\[
A = \begin{bmatrix}
0 & 0 & 0 & -c_1 & -s_1 & 0 & 0 & c_1 & s_1 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & c_2 & s_2 & -c_2 & -s_2 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & -c_3 & -s_3 & c_3 & s_3 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & c_4 & s_4 \\
0 & c_5 & s_5 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & -c_5 & -s_5 \\
0 & c_6 & s_6 & 0 & 0 & -c_6 & -s_6 & 0 & 0 \\
c_7 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & -c_7 & -s_7 & 0 & 0 \\
c_8 & 0 & 0 & -c_8 & -s_8 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & -c_9 & -s_9 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
c_{10} & s_{10} & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
c_{11} & -c_{11} & -s_{11} & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
c_{12} & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0
\end{bmatrix}
\]

(6)

Here \(c_j\) and \(s_j\) are the direction cosine and sine for the element \(j\). The dimension of \(A\) is \(9 \times 9\). The state-space representation of Eqs. (2)–(4) is as follows.

\[
A \cdot \dot{X} = B \cdot X + C
\]

(7)

\[
A = \begin{bmatrix}
I_6 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & M & 0 \\
0 & 0 & T_2
\end{bmatrix},
\]

\[
B = \begin{bmatrix}
0 & I_9 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & -A^T \\
k_{ele} \cdot Λ & k_{ele} \cdot Τ_σ \cdot Λ & -I_{12}
\end{bmatrix},
\]

(9)

\[
C = [0 \ P^T \ 0]^T,
\]

(10)

\[
k_{ele} = \text{diag}[k_1 k_1 k_2 k_2 k_2 k_2 k_2 k_3 k_3 k_3],
\]

(11)

\[
Τ_σ = \text{diag}[Τ_{σ1} Τ_{σ1} Τ_{σ2} Τ_{σ2} Τ_{σ2} Τ_{σ2} Τ_{σ2} Τ_{σ3} Τ_{σ3} Τ_{σ3}],
\]

(12)

\[
Τ_σ = \text{diag}[Τ_{σ1} Τ_{σ1} Τ_{σ2} Τ_{σ2} Τ_{σ2} Τ_{σ2} Τ_{σ2} Τ_{σ3} Τ_{σ3}],
\]

(13)

where \(V = [i_5 u_5 u_6 i_r u_6 u_6 u_6 u_{10} u_{11}]^T \in \mathbb{R}^{9 \times 1}\) is the velocity vector, and \(X = [U \ V \ f]^T \in \mathbb{R}^{30 \times 1}\) the state-space vector.
of the system. The subscript of the symbol I indicates the dimension of the identity matrix I. \( k_{\text{ele}} \) presents the stiffness matrix in the local coordinate system. \( T_e \) and \( T_r \) are matrices containing the time constants for each element. We remark that one can use the consistent mass matrix, calculated by \( \Lambda^T \cdot M^{\ast} \cdot \Lambda \), where

\[
M' = \text{diag} \left[ m_2 \, m_2 \, m_2 \, m_2 \, m_2 \, m_2 \, m_1 \, m_1 \, m_1 \, m_1 \right] \in \mathbb{R}^{12 \times 12},
\]

(14)
to obtain more accurate solutions. However, with the purpose of observing the anomalies in stiffness and damping in the low frequency regime, we use the lumped mass matrix and set \( m_1 = 10^{-2} \text{ kg} \), where \( j = 1, 2 \), denoting the mass points at the corners of the inner and outer triangle, respectively, to diminish inertia effects and increase natural resonant frequencies of the structure so large that the difference between the use of the diagonal or consistent mass matrix becomes indistinguishable. The required computational time to invert a diagonal mass matrix is minimal, compared to the consistent mass matrix. The required computational time to invert a diagonal mass matrix becomes indistinguishable. Structure so large that the difference between the use of the diagonal or consistent mass matrix becomes indistinguishable. The required computational time to invert a diagonal mass matrix is minimal, compared to the consistent mass matrix. Since the mass matrix does not come into play in static analysis, the concern, if any, with the influence of the mass matrix comes from Eq. (7). The number of eigenvalues is 30. This number may well exceed one’s expectation from experience with Hamiltonian system since our system is non-Hamiltonian, and the mathematical formulation is based on the state-space representation.

In three-dimensional continuum theory, according to Born and Huang [13], we remark that the internal stability of the material body can be studied by analyzing the sign of the eigenvalue \( \lambda \) in the following equation.

\[
(C_{pqrs}k_j - \rho \mu \delta_{pr})u_j = \bar{b}_p.
\]

(17)

Here for isotropic materials \( C_{pqrs} = \lambda v_{rs} \delta_{pq} \delta_{rs} + \mu (\delta_{pq} + \delta_{qr}) \). The symbol \( k_j \) denotes the wave vector along the \( j \) direction in three dimensions and \( \rho \) the density of the material. \( \bar{u}_j \) and \( \bar{b}_j \) are displacement and body force, respectively, in the Fourier space. The material body is internal unstable if the imaginary part of \( \lambda \) is less than zero. The stability conditions of all crystal classes have been summarized in Reference [18].

3. Results and discussion

For the triangular lattice cell, Fig. 3 shows the result of the overall bulk stiffness and normalized change of area, \( (A_f - A_0) / A_0 \), versus the tuning parameter \( k_1 \), under the quasi-static assumption (\( \omega = 0 \text{ rad/s} \)). Throughout the analysis, \( k_2 = 5 \) and \( k_3 = 10 \text{ kN/m} \). Fixing these two parameters will not lose the generality of our analysis since only the relative relationship of \( k_1, k_2 \) and \( k_3 \) is important in the search of the anomalies. As expected, the measured change of area is strongly related to that of overall stiffness. Here \( A_0 \) is the original area of the outer or inner triangle shown in Fig. 1, and \( A_f \) is the area of the corresponding triangle after deformation. The bulk stiffness is defined as \( P_{th} / u_0 \), the ratio of the vertical load to vertical displacement at node 3. It can be seen that the system shares the same feature as the 1-D system, reported in [4], i.e. its overall

![Fig. 3. Overall stiffness, measured at node 3 along y-direction, i.e. \( P_{th} / u_0 \), and change of structural shape \( (A_f - A_0) / A_0 \) versus the tuning parameter \( k_1 \). All elements are elastic, and the quasi-static process is assumed. Extreme overall stiffness is observed at \( k_1 = -0.4 \text{ kN/m} \), corresponding to minimal area change on the outer triangle. The dip appears around \( k_1 = -2.27 \text{ kN/m} \) on the curve of normalized change of inner triangle area is due to the re-orientation of the inner triangle, which can be observed in Fig. 4.](image)
bulk stiffness reaching a minimum first and then a maximum while decreasing \( k_1 \). We remark that due to the symmetry of geometry, material properties and the loading condition, \( P_6/u_6 \) represents the bulk property of the structure. The unsymmetrical displacement boundary conditions cause the structure not to deform in a completely symmetrical way. However, this effect is negligible.

Comparing the normalized area change of the inner and outer triangle with the stiffness of the system, one can see that significant anomalies in structural shape occur in both the inner and outer triangle when the stiffness of the system reaches its minimum. More interestingly, the normalized change of inner triangular area reaches a minimum at \( k_1 \sim -2.7 \) kN/m before its maximum at \( k_1 \sim -0.3 \) kN/m. This is due to the re-orientation of the inner triangle. With sufficient degrees of numerical resolution, the magnitude of the dip at \( k_1 \sim -2.7 \) kN/m would be zero, indicating the deformed area is the same as the undeformed one. Although the two areas are identical, they exhibit different orientations, as shown in Fig. 4 (B) and (D). However, it can be seen that change of the orientation of the inner triangle does not significantly influence the overall stiffness. Moreover, the size of the inner triangle shrinks to zero before changing its orientation.

For the configuration with extreme high stiffness \( (k_1 = -0.4 \) kN/m), there is not much change in the inner triangle in size, but the change of the outer triangle reaches a minimum, corresponding highest stiffness.

The evolution of the nested triangular structure is shown in Fig. 4, as \( k_1 \) decreases from positive to negative. Each figure is

![Fig. 4. Deformation under hydrostatic compression. (A) \( k_1 = 0.2 \), (B) \( k_1 = 0 \), (C) \( k_1 = -0.25 \), (D) \( k_1 = -0.29 \), (E) \( k_1 = -0.3 \), (F) \( k_1 = -0.32 \), (G) \( k_1 = -0.35 \) and (H) \( k_1 = -0.4 \). The stiffness is in units of kN/m. The graphs are normalized to the outer boundary. The steps for the evolution of the inner triangle are first size reduction, then reverse, expansion, reverse again, and finally decrease in size to a size-invariant state.](image)

![Fig. 5. Relationship between \( \tan \delta \) and \( r \) for the standard linear solid in the context of viscoelasticity with \( \omega_1 = 10 \) rad/s and \( \tau_\varepsilon = 10^{-4} \) s. The inset shows the Debye peak in the frequency domain for the standard linear solid with \( r = 10 \) and \( \tau_\varepsilon = 10^{-4} \) s.](image)
observed with the smallest part. System instability is occurred when a stability losing eigenvalue is defined when the eigenvalue corresponding the bulk mode contains positive real part. System instability is due to a shear mode. High damping and high stiffness can be obtained simultaneously around \( k_1 = 10^{-4} \) kN/m, but in the meta-stable regime.

normalized to the outermost boundary. During the process of decreasing \( k_1 \), we observe that first from (A) to (C) the size of the inner triangle decreases with \( k_1 \), until a minimum (zero size), and then a change of orientation follows, as shown in (D). When \( k_1 \) continues decreasing, the size of the inner triangle increases abruptly, approaching the size of the outer triangle, as shown in (E). After that, another change of orientation follows, and then the size of inner triangle decreases as \( k_1 \) decreases, as shown in (F) and (G). Finally, in (H), the size of the triangles are insensitive to \( k_1 \). Compared with the stiffness evolution of the system with respect to \( k_1 \) in Fig. 3, the configuration corresponding to the highest stiffness is similar to Fig. 4 (H).

Physically, this evolution demonstrates the significant interaction between the positive-stiffness and negative-stiffness phases.

As for the damping and stability calculations, viscoelastic time constants of elements and driving frequency are important. We choose \( \tau_{j1} = 10^{-4}, \tau_{j2} = 5 \times 10^{-4}\) and \( \tau_{j3} = 2 \times 10^{-4} \) seconds, and \( \tau_{\sigma j} = r_j \tau_{\sigma j}, \) where \( j = 1, 2, 3, \) for the inner triangle, links and outer triangle, respectively. And, we set the driving frequency \( \omega = 10 \) rad/s throughout. The physical meaning of the dimensionless parameter \( r \) relates to the strength of viscoelasticity [19].

More commonly, the loss tangent, \( \delta \), for the element \( j \) is adopted to describe the linear viscoelastic properties of material. For a standard linear solid, the relationship between \( \tan \delta \) and \( r_j \) is \( \delta_j = \omega(r_j - 1)\tau_{\sigma j}/(1 + r_j\omega^2\tau_{\sigma j}) \) for the element \( j \). Fig. 5 shows the relationship between \( \tan \delta \) and \( r \) for the standard linear solid with \( \omega = 10 \) rad/s and \( \tau_{\sigma j} = 10^{-4} \) s. The inset of Fig. 5 demonstrates the Debye peak of the standard linear solid in the frequency domain with the assumptions of \( r_j = 10 \) and \( \tau_{\sigma j} = 10^{-4} \) s. To simplify our analysis in the parameter space of \( r_j \), we assume \( r_1 = r_2 = r_3 = r \). Furthermore, since our interest is in demonstrating the anomalies in the low frequency regime, we set the driving frequency \( \omega \) to be 10 rad/s throughout, and use the dimensionless parameter \( r \) to measure the strength of viscoelasticity in the elements of the system.

As \( r \) increases, the baseline \( \tan \delta \) for the system increases, as shown in Fig. 6, while under hydrostatic loading. Although the quasi-static effective stiffness of the system is independent of the
parameter $r$, overall $\tan \delta$, calculated by Eq. (16), strongly depends on $r$. It can be seen that for $r=10$, the system exhibits high compliance and high damping simultaneously, and when $r$ is about 5000, high stiffness and high damping can be achieved at the same time, albeit in the meta-stable domain. For high damping and high stiffness applications, the parameter set, $k_1 = -0.4$, $k_2 = 5$, $k_3 = 10$ kN/m and $r=5000$, appears to be feasible, although its lifetime may be short. It is understood that the meta-stability originates from the finite time constant (i.e. the inverse of the eigenvalues) associated with divergence of deformation responses [7]. Furthermore, in Fig. 6, we observe the structure exhibits a system instability before the instability due to the bulk mode. An asymmetric shear mode may be responsible for the system instability.

Results of our $\tan \delta$ analysis for the structure are shown in Fig. 8; multiple peaks are observed. Comparing with effective stiffness under different loading conditions, as shown in Fig. 7, we identify that different damping peaks correspond to different loading cases. The damping peak around $k_1 = -0.3$ kN/m is accompanied by the stiffness anomaly, calculated under hydrostatic loading. Under simple shear, the system exhibits stiffness and damping anomaly around $k_1 = -1.5$ kN/m. In the case of uni-axial compression, we observe two anomalies in the system’s effective stiffness; one coincides with the bulk mode response and the other the shear mode. A peak split is observed with $r=5000$ for the shear mode. We note that although for the case $r=1.005$, the damping anti-peak of the bulk mode appears at about the same $k_1$ as the damping peak of the shear mode,
one can take advantage of either damping peak by exciting its corresponding mode.

By increasing the stiffness of the linking springs (i.e. $k_2$ springs), it is also observed (not shown) that in order to obtain the extreme stiffness peak, it requires $k_1$ to be more negative. Therefore, it becomes experimentally unrealizable with larger $k_2$ due to high degrees of instability. Physically, this result is consistent with the prediction from continuum theory in that if $k_2$ approaches infinity, the system becomes system with negative stiffness elements under load control, and it is unstable.

We remark that only one of the 9 tan $\delta$’s from Eq. (16) represents physical overall loss tangent of the system under a certain deformation mode. And, it is possible to identify modes without completely analyzing eigenvectors of the system since the physically relevant tan $\delta$ can be singled out by recognizing that the maximal compliance is in close relation to the maximal damping during the negative-stiffness tuning process. Comparison of different modes for the triangular lattice cell is shown in Figs. 7 and 8 for the effective stiffness and tan $\delta$. It can be realized that each of the damping peaks corresponds to a specific deformation mode. For example, the damping peak at $k_1 = -0.3$ kN/m is associated with the bulk mode, and that at $k_1 = -1.5$ kN/m corresponds to the shear mode. This result is consistent with the 1-D system containing negative stiffness [5], and one expects that extreme stiffness accompanies extreme damping. Furthermore, we remark that since it requires more negative $k_1$ to obtain high stiffness in the shear mode, the stability of the shear mode is weaker that that of the bulk mode.

Fig. 9 shows the results of our eigenvalue analysis with $k_1$ as a tuning parameter for $m_1 = m_2 = 10^{-12}$ kg. The degree of instability can be related to the magnitude of the stability losing eigenvalues. Note that, in order to plot the x-axis on the log scale, we use $-k_1$ as the horizontal axis, and the eigenvalues are in units of 1/s. Instability occurs when the real parts of eigenvalues become positive. The loss of stability is determined by the disappearance of the curves at their lower ends. Fig. 9 indicates the structure of eigenvalue curves does not change significantly with different strength of viscoelasticity. We remark that at the zero mass limit, the degree of instability is lesser as the strength of viscoelasticity in the elements increases, and stability of the structure depends on the corresponding deformation modes. However, slight perturbation will excite the stability losing eigenvalues at $k_1 = -0.9$ kN/m, causing system instability.

Although at a certain transition the change of structure geometry is enormous in order to maintain the force equilibrium between the positive-stiffness and negative-stiffness elements, it appears that, around the point that the system exhibits extreme high stiffness, the structure geometry is regular. Our analysis demonstrates firstly that a structure can be completely stable even when negative stiffness elements are present, such as when $-0.9 < k_1 < 0$ kN/m for the present case. Secondly, with negative stiffness elements, the stable and meta-stable anomalies of the system can be obtained.

Thin films with anomalous material properties may be envisaged in light of the present research. Controlled phase transformations of materials can give rise to negative stiffness via the gradient of the energy curve in the Landau theory. We claim that the heterogeneity required to achieve a balance between positive and negative stiffness phases might be obtainable using microlithography or nanolithography, as described in [20]. Alternatively, one can manufacture a film containing nano-grain inclusions of phase transforming material, such as VO$_2$, through sputtering deposition [21] or pulsed laser deposition [22].

4. Conclusions

We conclude that the two-dimensional systems with negative stiffness have essentially features as the one-dimensional systems. In other words, one can obtain stable extreme damping and meta-stable extreme stiffness in two dimensions. However, slight perturbations may excite other modes in the system, which make the 2D system appear to have weaker stability. The reduction in stability due to coupling between modes may depend on the geometrical configuration of the system.

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